

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CHAIRMAN
Subcommittee on the
Middle East & North Africa

Subcommittee on
Western Hemisphere

PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE
ON INTELLIGENCE

www.twitter.com/roslehtinen
www.youtube.com/ileanaroslehtinen



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

27TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

PLEASE RESPOND TO:

2206 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0927
☐ (202) 225-3931
FAX: (202) 225-5620
<http://www.house.gov/ros-lehtinen>

DISTRICT OFFICE:
4960 SW 72 AVENUE
SUITE 208
MIAMI, FL 33155
☐ (305) 668-2285
FAX: (305) 668-5970

August 18, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

I urge you to denounce the Maduro regime's ongoing delays and repressive actions designed to prevent a recall referendum in Venezuela this year. I also continue to urge you to apply strict sanctions against those Venezuelan officials responsible for the unjust incarceration of Leopoldo Lopez, all Venezuelan political prisoners, and U.S. citizens being held by Venezuelan authorities.

Last week, the CNE announced an updated timeline for the recall process that would likely place a final referendum after the key date of January 10, 2017, which will ensure that Maduro or his hand-picked successor will remain in power for years. This latest stall tactic by the CNE is unacceptable as the Venezuelan people continue to voice their strong support for a referendum this year in order to illustrate their overwhelming disapproval of the current regime. The Maduro regime's delay tactics undermine the Venezuelan constitution and disregard the will of millions of Venezuelans.

As with the CNE, the political decisions orchestrated by Maduro at Venezuelan institutions also extend to the judicial system as both entities continue to violate the human rights of the Venezuelan people. On September 11, 2015, I, along with 19 of my congressional colleagues, sent you and Secretary Lew a bipartisan letter requesting that State and Treasury enforce sanctions as mandated by law against those individuals responsible for the unjust sentencing of Leopoldo Lopez. However, to date, no action has been taken on this matter. Last week, the corrupt Venezuelan judicial system upheld the unjust conviction of Leopoldo Lopez and denied his appeal. Unless immediate remedies are undertaken, I am concerned about the well-being and safety of all political prisoners in Venezuela.

Sanctions against Venezuelan officials, including the revocation of visas and blocking of individual financial assets, should not only be applied against those involved in the sentencing of Venezuelan political prisoners but also against any entity involved in the incarceration U.S. citizens. According to press reports, Venezuela has at least 12 U.S. citizens in custody. In June, U.S. citizens Joshua Holt and his wife Tamara Caleño were allegedly held by military intelligence. Also in June, the Venezuelan National Guard unjustly arrested Francisco "Pancho" Márquez and Gabriel "Gabo" San Miguel. Francisco "Pancho" Márquez is both a U.S. and Venezuelan citizen. In 2014, Todd Michael Leininger was also arrested in Venezuela and he is reportedly still awaiting trial while his condition in detention has deteriorated.

As you know, State is responsible for ensuring Americans held overseas are treated fairly and humanely, are allowed access and visits by U.S. embassy officials, and have access to appropriate medical care. With that in mind, how would you describe the access our embassy staff is being provided to U.S. citizens being held in Venezuela and what is their level of access to medicine and food?

The Obama administration must hold the Venezuelan regime accountable for its actions against the people of Venezuela and U.S. citizens. By not acting, we are sending the wrong signal to the Maduro regime and it may believe that its destructive actions have no consequences. Thus, I urge you to advocate on behalf of the Venezuelan people to be able to vote on a referendum in 2016 and to apply strict sanctions against entities responsible for committing human rights violations against Leopoldo Lopez, all Venezuelan political prisoners, and U.S. citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ileana Ros-Lehtinen', is written over the printed name.

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Member of Congress